

HAND WASHING INFORMATION

Why is hand washing important?

Hand washing, when done correctly, is the single most effective way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases. Good hand washing technique is easy to learn and can significantly reduce the spread of infectious diseases in both children and adults.

What types of diseases can good hand washing prevent?

- **Diseases spread through fecal-oral transmission**

Infections which may be transmitted through this route include salmonella, shigella, hepatitis A, giardia, enterovirus, amebiasis, campylobacter, etc. Because these diseases are spread through the ingestion of even minute particles of fecal material, hand washing following defecation cannot be overemphasized.

- **Diseases spread through indirect transmission.**

Infections which may be transmitted through this route include influenza, strep, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and the common cold. Because these diseases may be spread indirectly by hands freshly soiled by respiratory discharges of infected people, illness may be avoided by washing hands after coughing or sneezing.

- **Diseases spread when hands are contaminated with urine, saliva or other moist body substances.**

Infections which may be transmitted by one or more of these body substances include cytomegalovirus, schistosomiasis, typhoid, staphylococcal organisms, Epstein-Barr virus, etc. These germs may be transmitted from person to person or indirectly by contamination of food or of inanimate objects such as toys.



What is good hand washing technique?

There is more to hand washing than you think! By rubbing your hands vigorously with soapy water, you pull the dirt plus the oily soils free from your skin. The soap lather suspends both the dirt and germs trapped inside and are then quickly washed away. Follow these four simple steps to keeping hands clean:

- **Wet your hands** with warm running water.
- **Add soap, then rub** your hands together, making a soapy lather. Do this away from the running water for at least 10 seconds, being careful not to wash the lather away. Wash the front and back of your hands, as well as between your fingers and under your nails.
- **Rinse your hands well** under warm running water. Let the water run back into the sink, not down to your elbows. Turn off the sink with a paper towel and dispose in a proper receptacle.
- **Dry hands thoroughly** with a clean towel.

What type of soap should be used?

Any type of soap may be used. However, bar soap should be kept in a self draining holder that is cleaned thoroughly before new bars are put out and liquid soap containers (which must be used in day care centers) should be used until empty and cleaned before refilling.

To prevent chapping use a mild soap with warm water; pat rather than rub hands dry; and apply lotion liberally and frequently.

What are some things I should avoid regarding hand washing?

- **DON'T** use a single damp cloth to wash a group of children's hands.
- **DON'T** use a standing basin of water to rinse hands.
- **DON'T** use a common hand towel. Always use disposable towels.

- **DON'T** use sponges or non-disposable cleaning cloths unless you launder them on a regular basis, adding chlorine bleach to the wash water. Remember that germs thrive on moist surfaces!

What are some ways to help children with good hand washing technique?

Do not assume that children know how to wash their hands properly. It is important to teach, and help children to wash their hands. Let children **observe** good hand washing technique from the adults who care for them. Supervision, especially in a day care setting, is essential in forming good hand washing habits in children. Even though hands appear to be clean, they can carry germs or microorganisms that are capable of causing disease.

What about soap alternatives?

Alcohol-based hand rubs significantly reduce the number of microorganisms on skin, are fast acting and cause less skin irritation. When using an alcohol-based hand rub, apply product to palm of one hand and rub hands together, covering all surfaces of hands and fingers, until hands are dry. Note that the volume needed to reduce the number of bacteria on hands varies by product. When hands are visibly soiled, they should be washed with soap and water.

Good hygiene and preventative action

Wash hands or use alcohol-based rub if washing is not available **after:**

- Using the bathroom
- Coughing, sneezing, handling mucus membrane
- Touching door knobs, handles
- Shaking hands
- Handling money
- Using phones or computer keyboards
- Handling pets or animals including farm animals or petting zoos
- Handling raw meats or eggs
- Touching blood, non-intact skin, saliva, or bodily fluids
- Playing outdoors or with other children's toys

Wash hands or use alcohol-based rub if washing is not available **before:**

- Eating
- Cooking

Where can I get more information?

- Your local health department, listed in your telephone directory
- The Utah Department of Health, Bureau of Epidemiology (801) 538-6191

